

## March: UNSC 2018 and WSC 2019

March was a busy month for ISI on the world stage. The 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) was held on 6-9<sup>th</sup> March at UN Headquarters, preceded by the Special Seminar on Emerging Issues (2<sup>nd</sup> March) and the High Level Forum (5<sup>th</sup> March). The Department of Statistics of Malaysia (DOSM) hosted a meeting of the ISI Executive Committee (EC) in Kuala Lumpur on March 19-20<sup>th</sup>. Then 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> March saw a 62<sup>nd</sup> ISI WSC planning meeting of representatives of the ISI EC and Scientific Program Committee (SPC) with the Local Organising Committee (LOC), Local Program Committee (LPC) and Professional Conference Organisation (PCO).



Starting from the last of the meetings, the ISI 2019 planning meeting demonstrated again the outstanding organization and thought going into the preparation for the 62<sup>nd</sup> WSC by the joint hosts, namely the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (DOSM), the Central Bank of Malaysia (BNM), and Malaysia Institute of Statistics (ISM). The care and detail in groundwork are excellent forecasters of a smooth path to ISI 2019 which is promising to be an excellent WSC in every way. As I write, the Scientific Program Committee (SPC) is starting their work on an inspiring line-up of Invited Paper Session (IPS) proposals, and Special Topic Session (STS) proposals are currently being prepared by many groups worldwide. The assistance being provided with local venues for satellite and associated events is excellent and welcome. And we can assure members that the plans for the social program, including the accompanying persons' program and the Malaysian cultural evening, are both exciting and thoughtful.

The United Nations Statistical Commission, established in 1947, is the highest body of the global statistical system. It brings together the Chief Statisticians from member states from around the world. It is the highest decision making body for international statistical activities especially the setting of statistical standards, the development of concepts and methods and their implementation at the national and international level. The UNSC itself has 24 (country) members elected by the United Nations Economic and Social Council for 4-year terms. All other UN countries are observers, as are a number of international, regional and specialised organisations, including ISI which has had observer status since the formation of the UNSC. The UNSC oversees the work of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), and is a Functional Commission of the UN Economic and Social Council. For some ISI members, this information is well-known, but many may not be as aware and it is clear that ISI is held in high regard on this particular international platform. Of all individual ISI+Association members, only 12% are IAOS members but just over 40% of ISI organizational members are National Statistical Offices.

The topic of the High Level Forum on the Monday was '*Communicating data and statistics: Bringing trusted and actionable data to the public, the media and policy-makers*'. Throughout the week, I was struck by the increasing commonalities of concerns between official statistics and all areas of statistics, as was exemplified by this forum, with discussion on the challenges of communication echoing what is heard in so many areas of statistics, including how to attract, engage and genuinely inform the public, clients and users; how to increase trust and constructive understanding of statistics; relationships/overlap with data science; and how to train statistical producers to communicate well. Even the notion of using a word other than 'statistics' was raised in the same way as has been seen at various times across statistics. And, as on other such occasions, it was notable that an alternative word such as 'information', is always preceded by 'good' or 'quality'. Perhaps the adjective 'good' before words like 'data', 'information' etc, should be synonymous with 'statistical'.

The UNSC session itself is formal with reports of many working groups, discussion and decision processes to approve the work program. The many documents, final report and webcasts can be found at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/49th-session/> . But just as important, and contributing to very full daily schedules, are the numerous side events and side meetings, both formal and informal. The ISI's side event was well attended and received, and was reported in the March News (<https://www.isi-web.org/images/news/2018-03ISE.pdf>).

ISI was represented by its President, Director and Vice-President Stephen Penneck. As well as taking part in side events, ISI representatives met with representatives of UNSD, World Bank, Eurostat, EFTA (European Free Trade Association), Esri, Inter-American Statistical Institute (IASI), African Centre for Statistics (UNECA), CBS Tanzania and East Africa Statistical Training Centre (EASTC), AfDB, Malaysia, Morocco, and individuals from a number of country delegations.

Vice-President Penneck was appointed ISI representative in the Friends of the Chair Group for the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FPOS). In the Group's initial meeting, he spoke of the issues raised with ISI that are in fact breaches of the FPOS, but there is no mechanism to address these. Other issues discussed in this meeting included the proposal for the UN Chief Statistician (see the UNSC papers), and what would be his/her role in non-compliance; how to support people with the principles in their work, including guidance for people working in new roles; and challenges of open data.

As further evidence of the international standing and respect in which ISI is held, I was appointed the inaugural chair of the newly formed Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training (GIST) at the initial meeting of founding members and stakeholders advisory group. At the meeting, the UNSD gave a presentation on the activities leading to the setting up of GIST, including results of a survey of training institutions of founding members. There was considerable discussion with some urging an ambitious approach and others more focussed with some concerns about the scope of the ToR and the proposed work programme. I have followed up with initial meetings, at the UN and virtually, with UNSD staff about organisation and structure of the GIST and planning the work, including parallel work streams, task forces, governance, and timelines.

A very busy month for ISI, but one that fully demonstrates again the key roles played by ISI globally.

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